

ENGLISH: AREA OF STUDY: BELONGING

Belonging Essay: 'The Crucible'

The concept of 'Belonging' is a unanimous need which involves the struggle to maintain one's personal integrity, identity and power within a community, place or relationship and is the journey inevitably experienced throughout every generation effectively stemming from the fear of not-belonging. This contributes to a person's survival and emotional well-being and reaches its absolute climax once self-actualisation is achieved. However, some people who experience self-actualisation may choose to stop belonging to the community and prefer to belong only to themselves; their struggle will end in sadness or death, or will be overcome depending on their individuality and goodness. This is represented in Arthur Miller's allegorical play 'The Crucible' through his use of character development, stagecraft and symbolism. Two other texts which also embrace this concept are George Miller's animated film 'Happy Feet' and Peter Carnavas' picture book 'Jessica's box'. In these texts various techniques are used to represent 'Belonging'. In 'Happy Feet' George Miller uses a narrating voice and the target audience of children and in 'Jessica's Box' Carnavas uses a contrast in colours as well as the target audience of children to advocate 'Belonging' as the driving force behind every action. Evidently, everyone strives to belong to the extent that they would sacrifice their own life.

Furthermore, a person cannot belong to a place or person until they belong to themselves. In 'The Crucible' Reverend John Hale does belong at the beginning of the play. The town of Salem welcomes him "Oh! Mr Hale! It's so good to see you" (Act 1). However, in truth he is only a "tight-skinned; eager-eyed intellectual" who alleges he is a professional at eradicating witches when in reality his books "weighted with authority" could not possibly free the theocratic state of Salem from mass hysteria. Forcing himself to see the truth and accept it he starts belonging to himself when he rebels against the clearly corrupt authorities; the court led by Danforth. "I will shut my conscience to it no more – private vengeance is working in this testimony . . . I denounce these proceedings! I quit this court" (Act 3). Unlike John Hale, in 'Happy Feet' the protagonist 'Mumble' accepts himself from the beginning "don't ask me to change cus' I can't!". here, where he is excluded from his family, friends, his graduation party and the love of his life Gloria by the contradictory, criticizing and demoting authorities because he has no 'heart song', Mumble is able to transcend and rise above into a resilient penguin who goes to extreme measures to prove the existence of 'aliens' (humans) and retrieve more fish for the consumption of his community. Hence, it is seen that in order to progress onto the journey towards belonging to a place, one must reach self-actualisation and belong to themselves.

Similarly, when one is excluded from a social status, family, place or person they will struggle to belong and do anything in their power to belong. Abigail Williams is deprived of a family, genuine friends and the love of her Uncle, Paris. As a result she seeks affection and receives it from the protagonist, John Proctor. However, when she is rejected by him "Wipe it out of mind! We never touched Abby!" (Act 1) her past comes back to haunt her and she is forced to resort to controlling others "I saw Indians smash my parents' heads next to mine . . . and I can make you wish you had never seen the sun go down!" (Act 1). Abigail becomes an honourable liar of the court in an attempt to evict Elizabeth Proctor from John Proctor's life and consequently belong to him. She demonstrates her abilities to operate within the forces of darkness to ensure her belonging, making a multiple number of false accusations, sending 39 people to hang. This is all for her to belong to herself as an independent individual, rather than a child slave. She even denies the fact that she is a child "How dare you call ma child?" (Act 1). However, her lack of understanding and experience inhibits the positive effects of her journey to belong. She is able to manipulate the Massachusetts community into an uproar of deceit, but is unable to fulfill her utter-most desires. Hence, belonging will only succeed when the process is positive on those surrounding the alienated.

In addition, Arthur Miller's use of allegory to represent the communist witch-hunts of the 1950s in the 1962 witch-hunts of Salem demonstrates the significance of the struggle to belong globally, everywhere. When the town of Salem begins to talk of witches, John Proctor is unable to prevent himself from becoming involved as he is aware of the truth, where there are no real witches, at all. The theocratic state is only supporting these allegations in order to control the townspeople and maintain the conformity they have enforced through threats of terror and repression. "Who cries for these, cries for corruption" (Act 4). But, in order to emit truth and goodness John Proctor confesses to his adulterous act "God help me! I lusted . . .". The sense of separation between he and his wife at the beginning of Act 2 in the stage commentary "[. . . their sense of separation rises. . .]" changes when he sees the goodness in himself "for now I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor". Consequently, he dies a tragic hero and overthrows the corrupt authorities through his nobility. Similarly, in 'Jessica's Box' the bright colours demonstrate her emergence from the conformity of her box. Jessica is able to defy the obstacles such as the selfish children and the groundskeeper which have stood in her way of finding a genuine friend. Hence, breaking away from an authority evokes emancipation and ensures belonging.

Therefore, belonging is a unanimous need and struggle to find the truth in oneself. It is accomplished in different ways by different people. 'The Crucible', composed by Arthur Miller demonstrates this perception of 'Belonging' very successfully through character development, symbolism and stagecraft. These ideas are also very prominently supported in Peter Carnavas' picture book 'Jessica's Box' and George Miller's film 'Happy Feet'. Thus, 'Belonging', an essential struggle endured by everyone worldwide in different ways can be positive or negative. For, one can belong to one thing, whilst not-belonging to another.